

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 019610  
ORIGIN EA-12

INFO OCT-02 EUR-12 ISO-00 L-03 EB-08 INR-07 DLOS-09  
CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 FMC-01 NSAE-00  
CG-00 OES-07 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 PA-01  
USIA-06 PRS-01 /095 R

DRAFTED BY EA/VLC:TMCARNEY/FMLC  
APPROVED BY EA:ROAKLEY  
EA/VLC:FZBROWN  
L/EA:SORLINS  
EB/MA:RJOHE  
INR/DFR/RGE:RHODGSON (SUBS.)  
D/LOS:RBLUMBERG

-----002967 252026Z /46

R 250153Z JAN 78  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO AMEMBASSY PARIS  
INFO CINCPAC  
SECDEF

S E C R E T STATE 019610

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PDIP, EWWT, US, VM

SUBJECT: APPROACH TO VIETNAM ON MERCHANT SHIP INCIDENT

1. ON JANUARY 2 THE U.S.-FLAG MERCHANT VESSEL S.S. GATEWAY CITY RECEIVED APPROX. 15-20 ROUNDS OF SMALL CALIBER AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE AND WAS CHASED IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS BY WHAT APPEARED TO THREE GATEWAY CITY OFFICERS TO HAVE BEEN A 40 FT. VIETNAMESE VESSEL. CLOSEST VESSEL CAME TO GATEWAY CITY WAS 3/4 MILES. DEBRIEFING THE SHIP'S OFFICERS HAS RESULTED IN NO RPT NO POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION OF THE ATTACKER BUT THE SHIP'S LOCATION AT THE TIME OF THE  
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INCIDENT, SEVEN DEGREES FIFTY MINUTE NORTH ONE HUNDRED FOUR DEGREES TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES EAST AT 1772 LOCAL TIME STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT VIETNAMESE VESSELS, PROBABLY MILITIA RATHER THAN NAVY, ON PATROL DUTY WERE RESPONSIBLE. UNLIKE THE CASE OF THE YACHT BRILLIG, THE GATEWAY CITY REPORTED A FIRM FIX ON ITS POSITION WELL OUTSIDE OF THE SRV'S CLAIMED 12 MILE TERRITORIAL WATERS AND THE ADDITIONAL 12

MILE CONTIGUOUS ZONE THE SRV CLAIMS AS A "ZONE OF CONTROL."

2. GIVEN THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS IF SUCH INCIDENTS RESULT IN LOSS OF LIFE OR SEIZURE OF A U.S.-FLAG VESSEL, EMBASSY LIAISON OFFICER PRATT SHOULD IN THE NEAR FUTURE MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS ORALLY:

--THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASKED THAT AN INCIDENT ON THE HIGH SEAS BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES. A U.S.-FLAG MERCHANT VESSEL, THE S.S. GATEWAY CITY REPORTED JANUARY 2 THAT IT HAD RECEIVED 15-20 ROUNDS OF SMALL CALIBER WEAPONS FIRE AND WAS CHASED FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES. THE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE AT 1722 HOURS LOCAL TIME JANUARY 2 AND RESULTED IN NO DAMAGE OR INJURIES TO THE GATEWAY CITY OR ITS CREW. THE U.S.-FLAG SHIP DETERMINED ITS POSITION AT THE TIME OF ATTACK AS 7 DEGREES 50 MINUTES NORTH LATITUDE 104 DEGREES 24 MINUTES EAST LONGITUDE, 44 MILES FROM HON KHOAI ISLAND.

--THE NATIONALITY OF THE ATTACKING VESSEL WAS NOT DETERMINED. THE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE NEAR VIETNAMESE TERRITORIAL WATERS, HOWEVER, UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SUGGEST THAT THE PURSUING CRAFT MAY HAVE BEEN VIETNAMESE. OTHER U.S.-FLAG SHIP CAPTAINS, ON HEARING OF THE GATEWAY CITY INCIDENT, MENTIONED THAT THEY WERE AWARE OF SEVERAL SIMILAR INCIDENTS DURING 1977.

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--I AM RAISING THIS AS A MATTER FOR THE ATTENTION OF YOUR AUTHORITIES IN THE HOPE OF AVOIDING ANY POSSIBLE FUTURE PROBLEMS. FOR OUR PART, AFTER THE GATEWAY CITY ATTACK, THE APPROPRIATE AMERICAN AUTHORITY NOTED THE INCIDENT IN A NOTICE TO MARINERS AND REITERATED SPECIAL WARNING NO. 45 TO MARINERS ISSUED IN 1975 WHICH ADVISED VESSELS TO REMAIN AT LEAST 20 NAUTICAL MILES OFF THE COAST OF VIETNAM INCLUDING THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS. WE WILL SHORTLY REISSUE THIS WARNING BUT ADVISE AMERICAN MERCHANT SHIPS TO STAY 30 NAUTICAL MILES OFF THE VIETNAMESE COAST. THIS IS NOT TO IMPLY ACCEPTANCE OF YOUR OCEAN BOUNDARIES BECAUSE THE U.S. ONLY RECOGNIZES A THREE MILE TERRITORIAL LIMIT AND NINE MILE CONTIGUOUS ZONE. BY ISSUING THE WARNING WE HOPE TO HELP AVOID POSSIBLE FUTURE INCIDENTS.

VANCE

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** SHIP HARASSMENT, INTERNATIONAL WATERS, SHIP INTERCEPTIONS  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
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20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014